

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00
INRE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7252
INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1510

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGSC PEPR, SY
SUBJECT: SYRIANS IRRITATED WITH PLO

1. SUMMARY: PRIVATELY SOME SYRIANS INCLUDING THOSE CLOSE TO
PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD ARE ANNOYED AT PALESTINAIAN ACTIONS WHICH HAVE
EMBARRASSED SYRIA AND FORCED IT TO DECIDE BETWEEN AN IMPOSSIBLE WAR
OR STANDING IDLY BY WHILE SOUTH LEBANON IS OCCUPIED. OPINIONS VARY
AS TO HOW TO GET OUT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION BUT ALL AGREE THAT
ISRAELIS MUST WITHDRAW QUICKLY. THE MEDIA ATTACKS THE UNITED
STATES FOR COMPLICITY IN ISRAEL'S "AGGRESSION" BUT ALSO CONVEYS THE
IMPORTANT MESSAGE THAT NOBODY WILL BE ALLOWED TO IMPOSE ON SYRIA
THE TIME AND PLACE OF THE BATTLES IT WAGES. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT'S PRESS SECRETARY TOLD VISITING NEWSWEEK EDITOR
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DE BORCHGRAVE MARCH 17 THAT FATAH HAD NOT CONSIDERED
THE CONSEQUENCES OF ITS MARCH 11 ATTACK AND THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT
BE PROVOKED INTO A WAR. GHASSAN DROUBI, A BUSINESSMAN, WHO WAS
ASSAD'S INTERPRETER DURING HIS ARMY DAYS, CLAIMS ASSAD IS SECRETLY
PLEASED AT THE PLO'S DISCOMFITURE IN THE SOUTH. DROUBI SAYS
ASSAD CAN'T STAND ARAFAT, MISTRUSTS THE PLO, AND FEELS THAT
IT CONSTANTLY THREATENS TO PUT SYRIA IN A CORNER WHERE IT

MIGHT BE FORCED TO FIGHT ISRAEL ON ISRAELI TERMS.

3. OTHER SYRIANS ARE TELLING US PRIVATELY THEY ARE INCENSED OVER THE FATAH ATTACK ON ISRAEL AND THE RESULTANT IDF CAMPAIGN IN SOUTH LEBANON. THEIR ANGER IS DIRECTED MORE TOWARDS TO PLO THAN TOWARDS THE ISRAELIS. THEY CLAIM THE PALESTINIANS HAVE PUT SYRIA IN AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT POSITION. A FEW PALESTINIANS HAVE DEFENDED THE FATAH ACTION, THOUGH NOT ITS EXECUTION. THEY SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVELY SAY THAT THE WORLD HAD TO BE REMINDED OF THE PLO'S ROLE IN ANY PEACE NEGOTIATIONS. OPINIONS ARE MIXED AS TO WHAT TO DO NOW. THERE IS UNANIMITY THAT ISRAEL MUST WITHDRAW QUICKLY. THE FEAR IS EXPRESSED THAT IF PROMPT WITHDRAWAL IS NOT FORTHCOMING, ISRAEL WILL ONCE AGAIN FIND IT CONVENIENT TO STAY IN OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORY INDEFINITELY.

4. GREEK ORTHODOX BISHOP JIBRAN, WHO PERIODICALLY MEETS WITH A ASSAD'S SECURITY ADVISOR GENERAL KHULI, BELIEVES THAT THE BEST IMMEDIATE SOLUTION IS TO INSERT A UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN THE SOUTH. HE FEELS THE LEBANESE ARMY CANNOT BE PREPARED RAPIDLY ENOUGH TO ENSURE PROMPT ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND G. GSIT WOULD HAVE DIFFICULTY NEGOTIATING SUPPLY AND FREE PASSAGE ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE PALESTINIANS. A PALESTINIAN SOURCE, WHO IS CLOSE TO THE TOP LEADERSHIP IN THE PLO, DISAGREES. HE SAYS THAT A RELATIVELY SMALL CONFIDENTIAL

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LEBANESE ARMY FORCE COULD CONTROL A BUFFER STRIP IF THE PLO WERE TO AGREE. HE CLAIMS THE PLO WOULD REACT POSITIVELY TO SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT.

5. THE MEDIA, OF COURSE, DOES NOT REFLECT PRIVATE FEELINGS AGAINST THE PLO. EDITORIALS IN MARCH 17 PRESS HAMMER AWAY AT A CONSTANT THEME THAT THE FACT THE US WAS WARNED OF ISRAEL'S ATTACK IN ADVANCE IS PROOF OF US "CONNIVANCE" IN THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION. ONE EDITORIAL SHOWED THAT EGYPT'S CRITICISM OF SYRIA'S PASSIVE STANCE HAS DRAWN A BIT OF BLOOD HERE. THE EDITORIAL LASHED OUT AT SADAT FOR AIMING HIS MEDIA'S "POISONED ARROWS, NOT AGAINST THE AGGRESSORS AND THEIR AMERICAN SUPPORTERS, BUT AGAINST SYRIA." THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGE THE MEDIA CARRIED, HOWEVER, WAS IN A TISHRIIN EDITORIAL MARCH 16; "NOBODY WILL BE ALLOWED TO IMPOSE ON US THE TIME AND PLACE OF THE BATTLES WE WAGE. WE ARE STRONG IN OUR DETERMINATION TO STRUGGLE AND SACRIFICE. RIGHT AND JUSTICE ARE WITH US, THE UN CHARTER AND RESOLUTIONS ARE WITH US, WORLD PUBLIC OPINION AND STRONG FRIENDS ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE WITH US, THE TIME FACTOR IS ON OUR SIDE. WE FEEL NO RESTLESSNESS OR ISOLATION. TIME WORKS FOR US." MURPHY

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